

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
Meeting Minutes
March 14, 2007

A meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) was held on Wednesday, March 14, 2007, at the American Legion Department of Virginia Headquarters Building, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue in Richmond.

Members Present

Jim Aucoin, *AMVETS*; John C. Bonnell, Jr., *Marine Corps League*; Mason Botts, *Air Force Association*; Daniel D. Boyer, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*; John T. Edwards, *Korean War Veterans Association*; Paul Galanti, *BVS Chairman (ex-officio)*, Robert O. Gray, *American Ex-Prisoners of War*; Jenny M. Holbert, *Women Marines Association*; John T. Jackson, *Paralyzed Veterans of America*; Norman Jasper, *Military Order of the Purple Heart*; Daniel Miller, *Disabled American Veterans*; Cornelius T. O'Neill, *American Legion*; Richard J. Rinaldo, *Legion of Valor of the U. S., Inc.*; Frank Sherman, *Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*; Kenneth Smith, *Virginia National Guard Association*; Tom Stephen, Jr., *Reserve Officers Association*; and Frank Wickersham, *MOAA*

Members Absent

Vince Burgess, *Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services*; David Ellis, *NAUS*; R. Goodwin Sacra, *Navy Seabee Veterans of America*; Richard Schneider, *Non-Commissioned Officers Association*; Thomas Snee, *Fleet Reserve Association*; Sam Wilder, *AUSA*.

Alternates Present

Paul Hamaker, *NAUS*; Don Kaiserman, *AUSA*

Other Alternates Present

John Cooper, *AMVETS*; John Dozier, *Korean War Veterans*; Wes Edwards, *MOAA*; Jack Hilgers, *Legion of Valor of the U. S., Inc.*

Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present

Sara Wilson, *Director, Virginia Department of Human Resource Management*; Rick Pugh, *Virginia Department of Human Resource Management*; Steven Combs, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Roz Trent, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Anne Atkins, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Martha Mead, *Virginia Department of Veterans Services*; Don Ferguson, *Office of the Attorney General*

Others Present

Harry Warner, *Executive Director, Virginia War Memorial Foundation*; Dr. Steven Danish, *Virginia Commonwealth University*; Don Gehring, *Virginia Commonwealth University*; W. Andrew Taylor, *Chair, National Association of Black Veterans*; Alexander Brooks, *National Association of Black Veterans*; Charlie Montgomery, *Vietnam Veterans of America*; Wayne

Duprey, *Disabled American Veterans*; Kim Deshano, *Veterans of Foreign Wars*; Greg Eanes (private citizen)

Agenda Packet

Meeting Agenda; draft Minutes of the December 21, 2006, meeting; Executive Summary for the Virginia Commonwealth University Veterans Center; A Proposal for the Virginia Commonwealth University Veterans Center; Veterans In State Workforce Presentation; Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations 2007 Legislative Agenda - Updated March 12, 2007

Other Handouts

“PayDay” or Short-Term Loans; JLC Event During General Assembly Sessions Draft; Do Contributions to Legislators Motivate How They Will Vote?; Talking Points on SB 1145

Opening and Pledge of Allegiance

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m. at the American Legion Department of Virginia Headquarters Building, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue in Richmond. Roz Trent led the Council in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag.

Roll Call of VSOs and Quorum Determination

Nineteen of the twenty-one member Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) were recorded as being represented (15 by a primary member; 3 by an alternate member), and a quorum was determined. *MOAA* representative Frank Wickersham arrived late and assumed representation for his VSO from alternate *MOAA* representative Wes Edwards.

Review and Approval of October 11, 2006 Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the December 21, 2006 meeting were reviewed. A **motion** was made by Norman Jasper, seconded by Daniel Miller, and passed unanimously, to approve the minutes as written.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Veterans Center Presentation

Dr. Steven Danish, Director of Life Skills Center and Professor of Psychology, Preventive Medicine and Community Health, at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) gave a brief presentation of the Executive Summary and Proposal for the VCU Veterans Center. He introduced Dr. Don Gehring, VCU Vice President of Governmental Public Affairs – Health Policy, who also gave brief remarks. In summary, in response to Executive Order 19, VCU is proposing to develop the only university-based center focused exclusively on the needs of veterans, especially veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The Veterans Center is proposing to provide services in conjunction with the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center, Fort Lee, the Quantico Marine Corps Base, and the Norfolk Naval Station, as well as various state agencies, such as the Department of Veterans Services and the Virginia National Guard.

Chairman Botts suggested that Dr. Danish work with a JLC representative to further discuss this proposal. Dan Miller recommended that Dr. Danish also contact Jerry Lindsay at the Virginia Employment Commission for additional assistance. Discussion followed.

Chairman Botts thanked Dr. Danish for his presentation.

Veterans Preference Presentation

Sara Wilson, Director, Virginia Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) introduced Rick Pugh, Director of Compensation and Policy, DHRM. Ms. Wilson presented a PowerPoint presentation entitled “*Veterans in the State Workforce.*” In summary, she stated that per legislation introduced during the 2007 General Assembly session, (HB 2840 – Delegate Frank Hall; SB 1033 – Senator Jay O’Brien) on Veterans Preference, the word “*consideration*” was replaced with the word “*preference.*” This legislation “requires DHRM to develop and distribute guidelines as an addendum to the Commonwealth Hiring Policy.” DHRM will receive input from veterans’ groups; review federal guidelines; draft state guidelines; request feedback from the veterans’ community and from state agency HR directors; and will partner with the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) to recruit veterans.

Ms. Wilson stressed the need for clarification and interpretation of the word “preference.” She welcomed any input from the JLC and encouraged members to send ideas/suggestions to the DVS to assist in developing guidelines. Guidelines are to be developed and communicated to agencies by July 1, 2007.

Discussion followed. Afterwards, Chairman Botts thanked Ms. Wilson and Mr. Pugh for their presentation.

The JLC recessed for lunch at 11:55.

Chairman Botts called the meeting back to order at 12:35 p.m.

Chairman Botts informed members that due to personal obligations, Sam Wilder would be unable to actively participate in the JLC for the foreseeable future. He asked members to keep Mr. Wilder and his family in prayer.

He urged members to meet with their organizations to determine legislative priorities that the JLC should address. He reiterated the JLC legislative process: (1) JLC members bring legislative issues of individual organizations to the JLC; (2) the JLC will process and prioritize legislative issues and develop the JLC Legislative Agenda; (3) the JLC Legislative Agenda is discussed with the Virginia Citizen-Soldier Support Council, the Virginia Military Advisory Council, the Board of Veterans Services, and the Veterans Services Foundation to develop a unified list of legislative priorities. In this manner, there will be “one voice” for veterans’ issues when meeting with legislators.

The Chairman stated that the 2008 legislative agenda will be discussed at the May 16th JLC meeting. He stressed the importance of having an organized process to achieve success in having veterans issues addressed during the legislative session.

Don Kaiserman concurred and stated that because of the organized JLC legislative process and the position papers on legislative issues, the 2007 legislative session resulted in a huge success for veterans' issues.

Veterans General Assembly After-Action Review/Department of Veterans Services Initiatives

In the absence of Commissioner Burgess and Sam Wilder, Steven Combs, DVS Director of Policy and Planning, briefed members on the summary of the JLC 2007 Legislative Agenda – Updated March 12, 2007. Copies of the Legislative Agenda summary, divided by priorities for the JLC and the actions taken by the 2007 General Assembly, were included in the agenda packets. Priority was given to five of the seven legislative agenda items. Mr. Combs concurred that this had been a very successful legislative session, and the bills that dealt with veterans issues that passed the 2007 General Assembly did so unanimously.

Harry Warner, Executive Director of the War Memorial Educational Foundation spoke regarding Priority #4 – Virginia War Memorial Educational Wing. He thanked the JLC for supporting the passage of this legislation. He clarified that the \$3.5 million is not a loan to the War Memorial per se, but rather is an internal-type structure in that the loan will be paid back internally through the treasury. Once it is verified that the War Memorial Education Foundation has raised \$2 million in private funds to support construction of the Educational Wing, the \$3.5 million loan will be changed to an outright grant to the War Memorial.

Don Kaiserman stated that corporations, rather than individuals, could contribute large dollar amounts to help fund the War Memorial Educational Wing. He suggested that JLC members who know of persons in charge of large corporations (CEOs, Presidents, etc.) filter through the JLC to those members who will go out and solicit contributions from corporations. Mr. Kaiserman volunteered to be the point person to accept cards of CEOs from JLC members and pass them on to the Virginia War Memorial Education Foundation.

Jack Hilgers spoke regarding Priority #6 – Pay Day Lending. A handout was distributed, written from the perspectives of Delegate Ware and Senator Saslaw, on “Pay Day” or Short-Term Loans to help the JLC get an idea of the perplexity of pay day lending. Mr. Hilgers suggested that members keep an “eye” on this issue. Chairman Botts stated pay day lending is a visceral and emotional issue for many people, and many people do not understand the facts. He emphasized that if pay day lending is brought up as a 2008 legislative agenda, the JLC must gather additional facts to be better prepared to discuss this issue.

Mr. Hilgers also distributed a separate handout entitled “Can a Legislator’s Vote Be Bought?” for the JLC’s information.

Chairman Botts addressed Priority #7 – State Tax Exemption. While this was not directly a veterans issue, it was an issue the JLC chose to address, but did not vigorously pursue. For next year, he suggested that as the JLC selects legislative issues and prioritizes them, it needs to vigorously develop background information as part of the process.

Ken Smith stated that General Newman, the Adjutant General, expressed his thanks to the JLC for its support of National Guard issues.

Don Kaiserman stated that MOAA is trying to get a Guard member and eventually an active duty member on its legislative committee. He stated that representation from the Guard would be helpful in giving input on this issues faced. He suggested that other VSOs consider expanding their membership to attain more insight on Guard and active duty legislative issues.

Chairperson's Report: Board of Veterans Services (BVS)

Paul Galanti, Chairman of the BVS, stated that he was very pleased with the outcome of the 2007 legislative session. He stated that the Board unanimously wants the TurboVet initiative to take place. TurboVet is a system similar to TurboTax, in that it is a web-based system to assist veterans in applying for veterans claims. He stated that this initiative is in place in many other states, and all parties, including the Governor's Chief of Staff, is interested in this concept. It is not known exactly when TurboVet will happen, but it will happen in the near future.

Mr. Galanti commended the JLC on lobbying for legislation. He stated that this was a phenomenally successful "victory year" for the JLC in getting its legislative agenda issues addressed and passed unanimously.

Mr. Galanti informed the JLC that there has been a delay in the opening of the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center, located on the grounds of the Hunter Holmes McGuire VA Medical Center. It will open in September 2007; rather than July 1.

Chairwoman's Report: Veterans Services Foundation (VSF)

Lydia Dudley, Chairwoman of the Veterans Services Foundation, updated the JLC on VSF activities. She stated that the VSF completed a needs assessment in November 2006. She welcomed any input from JLC members regarding any projects that the VSF could assist with.

Mrs. Dudley said that House Bill 3139, sponsored by Delegate Jack Ried, was introduced during the 2007 legislative session to abolish the VSF; however, this bill failed to pass in the Committee of General Laws. Mrs. Dudley stated that Dr. Leroy Gross, a member of the VSF, and Dr. John Anderson, former Chairman of the BVS, testified in committee on behalf of the VSF. She informed the JLC that in addition to five of its members' terms expiring June 30, 2007, this will be a transition year for the VSF, as it will move from its original charter to that of fund raising efforts. Norman Jasper offered his assistance in forwarding information on fund raising to Mrs. Dudley that may possibly assist the VSF in this effort.

The next meeting of the VSF will be Wednesday, April 4th – 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. at the American Legion Department of Virginia Building. Chairman Botts stated that he will be unable to attend this meeting, and asked for JLC representation. Jack Hilgers responded that he would attend in the Chairman's stead.

Department of Veterans Services Initiatives

Steven Combs updated the JLC on DVS initiatives as follows:

- Due to construction delays, the Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center will have its grand opening in early September, rather than in July, as originally scheduled.
- The State Approving Agency for Education and Training (educational benefits) held a Certifying Officials Workshop at George Mason University – March 12-14, 2007
- The burial rate at the Amelia and Suffolk Cemeteries is expected to be in the 700–750 range for FY07. Anne Atkins, DVS Director of Communications is working with the DVS Cemetery Director on marketing efforts for the veterans cemeteries
- Veterans Service Representative Positions:
 - Hampton VA Medical Center – Hired one agent
 - Salem VA Medical Center – one position filled
 - Fairfax Field Office – 1st agent position advertisement closes this week; 2nd agent in Fairfax is advertised
 - McGuire VA Medical Center – 2 agents at McGuire VA Medical Center; however, one agent is moving to the Hampton VA Medical Center, meaning the 2nd position will need to be advertised and filled
 - By mid-April, all 31 Veterans Service Representative positions should be filled
 - DVS is on track to fill all support field positions – 2 new full-time; 8 new part-time administrative positions. These 8 part-time positions will convert to full-time beginning new fiscal year
- Tuesday, March 13th - Veterans Forum sponsored by Senator Stosch at the American Legion Department of Virginia Building. Don Kaiserman was instrumental in organizing this event. Commissioner Burgess, Anne Atkins, Steven Combs, BVS Chairman Paul Galanti and DVS staff were present to address veterans' questions. Senator Stosch gave a wrap-up of General Assembly actions. Approximately 50 veterans/veterans families attended this forum to discuss veterans issues.
- Thursday, March 15th – DVS will sponsor the 5th of 5 Veterans Town Hall Meeting at the Virginia War Memorial – 6:00 p.m. DVS has hosted Town Hall meetings in Abingdon, Roanoke, Suffolk and Fredericksburg. The Town Hall Meetings, facilitated by Greg Brittingham, VCU Center for Public Policy, provide an opportunity for DVS to gather information regarding specific veterans' issues.

Old Business

SB 1145

Chairman Botts recognized Greg Eanes, who distributed a handout concerning SB 1145, and gave a brief presentation in opposition to the bill. He stated that SB 1145's definitions and applications of the law intended to create a state Service-Disabled Veterans Small Owned Business (SDVSOB) category are contrary and inconsistent with the spirit and intent of the Federal SDVSOB program. He stated that the more restricted language in SB 1145 demands a distinction between combat and non-combat disability, and also denies a large segment of the disabled veteran population from participating in the program. **He urged the JLC to pass a resolution recommending to Governor Kaine that SB 1145 be amended so that the spirit, intent and definitions in the law are consistent with Title 38 of the United States Code and Veterans Administration guidelines.**

Don Ferguson, DVS Counsel, stated that when a bill is received in the Office of the Attorney General, it is reviewed for legality. As written, the bill is legal. The policy part of the bill puts restrictions on how a service-disabled disability is defined. This is a policy decision made by the General Assembly as to whether there will be a state program that will mirror the federal program. The Governor can make changes, but it does not necessarily mean that the General Assembly will agree. After reading the bill, Mr. Ferguson clarified that the bill, as written, does not include counties, cities and/or towns. If localities elected to use the federal standards, they are free to do so. SB 1145 would only come into play when there is a state awarded contract.

After discussion, **Frank Wickersham made a motion that the JLC pass a resolution recommending to Governor Kaine that SB 1145 be amended so that the spirit, intent and definitions in the law are consistent with Title 38 of the United States Code and Veterans Administration guidelines. Motion was seconded by Paul Hamaker and passed unanimously. Chairman Botts requested Mr. Eanes to work with Steven Combs in drafting this resolution.**

Virginia National Guard Youth Camp

John Cooper referred to the e-mail previously sent to JLC members regarding the Virginia National Guard Youth Camp. He stated that there are many limitations to this program due to lack of funds. He requested JLC members and their respective organizations to assist in providing funds for this program.

Keeping Virginia Safe Legislative Event

Frank Wickersham attended this event as a MOAA representative. The ceremony was well attended by rescue personnel, police, guardsmen, etc. The Governor highlighted legislation passed affecting these groups.

New Business

JLC 2008 Legislative Agenda

Chairman Botts addressed the prioritization of JLC legislative issues. He asked that the VSOs bring all of their issues to the table, but stated that the JLC needed to concentrate on 4 or 5 top priorities that all VSOs would support. Don Kaiserman reiterated that the focus should be on key legislative priorities agreed upon and cover those issues with key legislators. Chairman Botts requested JLC members go back to their respective organizations and bring their legislative concerns/issues to the JLC. **At the May 16th meeting, the JLC will discuss and begin to prioritize its 2008 Legislative Agenda.**

Virginia Citizen-Soldier Support Council (VCSSC)

Chairman Botts requested that Frank Wickersham represent the JLC at the next meeting of the VCSSC in Sam Wilder's absence. Frank Wickersham said that he will attend the April meeting, and it was agreed that Tom Stephen will attend meetings thereafter.

JLC Legislative Breakfast

Chairman Botts asked Jack Hilgers to lead the discussion on the "JLC Day on the Hill." Mr. Hilgers distributed and briefly discussed the draft copy of the handout entitled "JLC Event During General Assembly Sessions." He stated that the draft will be more refined and for a

better perspective, will outline an agenda similar to the MOAA Day on the Hill event. **At the May 16th meeting, the JLC will discuss this issue and will make decisions regarding a JLC Day on the Hill event.**

Don Kaiserman stated that he had mentioned to Commissioner Burgess to consider the success of “Storming the Hill” event. If a JLC event is planned properly, it can be extremely successful. All JLC members and alternates can participate in organizing a JLC Storming the Hill/Day on the Hill event.

JLC Nominating Committee

Dan Miller stated that at the May meeting, the JLC should establish its nominating committee. Frank Wickersham has volunteered to Chair the Nominating Committee. Mr. Wickersham will select his committee and develop a slate of nominees. **Chairman Botts stated that he would like to have the election held at the May 16th meeting.**

Mr. Miller informed the group that he will be absent from the JLC for approximately one year, as he will be “on loan” from his Department (VEC) to the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS). His alternate – David Martinez – will be attending the May 16th meeting. The Disabled American Veterans organization is in the process of determining who will be the representative for the next year to the JLC.

JLC Potential Speaker

Don Kaiserman suggested that Dr. Lou Garrett, Medical Director for the Virginia Heart Institution, be invited to speak to the JLC to present his case regarding direct access to high-tech medical treatment that can be provided at a cheaper, faster rate for veterans. Chairman Botts requested that Don Kaiserman get the specifics and relay the information to him.

American Legion Contribution

Don Kaiserman suggested that the JLC contribute funds to the American Legion Department of Virginia for the use of the Department Headquarters Building. Chairman Botts will discuss this issue with Don Ferguson to make sure there are no legal stipulations.

Steven Combs informed the JLC that Roz Trent has accepted another position and will be leaving the DVS effective March 26th. He asked that all communications be sent to him until a replacement is hired. The JLC thanked Roz for the outstanding work done for the JLC.

Preparation for Next Meeting

The next meeting of the JLC will be Wednesday, May 16, 2007, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. at the American Legion Department of Virginia Building, 1708 Commonwealth Avenue in Richmond.

Public Comment Period

There was no public comment.

Adjourn

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.
